

10hh- No One Wants Sensuality

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(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

Q: Bhante, you once said that the only reason one gives into sensuality is because one doesn't want it. What do you mean by that?

Nm: Well, what I meant was that universally, literally every human mind, regardless of the culture, education or religion, when a desire in regard to anything obtainable through the senses arises, that desire is oppressing. Desire is a need, a thirst, a hunger, it pressures you to act. You don't have to act and that's the whole point. As a human being you have a choice. But when desire arises, the automatic response is to give into that pressure of desire, and why would you be giving into the pressure of any desire? It's because it's unpleasant. If the pressure of the desire is neutral or pleasant, you wouldn't then make any effort and spend time trying to gain what your desire wants, because you'll already be at ease. But that desire is already unpleasant and in order for you to try and deal with that displeasure, you just give in to whatever the desire promises. That's what I mean, by engaging in sensuality, you do so to be free from the sensual pressure of the desire. When people say, "No, I enjoy my senses." That's a mistake, because if they were to stop and think, "When there is an unsatisfied desire, is that pleasant? Is that what I want?" They would realise that it isn't, or, "Can I fulfil desire by giving in to it?" No, you can never fulfil desire, because the point of desire is to stay a desire.

Q: It's based on non-satisfaction.

Nm: Exactly, it requires non-satisfaction for it to be. That's why if you stop and think about it you realise the only reason you are engaged with sensuality is because the pressure of sensual desire is unpleasant and you don't know any other escape from that pressure other than the temporary release of sensual indulgence.

That's the whole point, whenever you encounter any form of displeasure, your only way of trying to deal with it is through acts of sensuality, which is why and how people turn to food, music, sexual intercourse or even meditation hoping for some pleasurable experience to lift them up when they're feeling down or depressed, they just commit harder to sensual activity, because that's the only thing that seemingly relieves oneself of that pressure. However, you're just making it worse because the more you're dependent on running away from that pressure of sensual desire, the more pressure that desire will exercise over you.

Q: So what should you do?

Nm: Well, in a way, you don't have to do anything. If you start seeing your own sensual desires as something that's controlling you, something that you are enslaved by, then you have to start seeing that 'nature' before you give into the desire. And then it becomes obvious, clear as day, that it's very unpleasant. Even sometimes when you can satisfy your desires, but maybe not quick enough, that's unpleasant. Either way, that desire is rooted in a disagreeable feeling, i.e. that pressure that's very unpleasant. So if you want to free yourself from it, you have to first start restraining your senses and from making it worse through giving in to that pressure of desire.

You're training yourself to be stronger than something else. But in order to start doing that, you need to start resisting that thing. If you just habitually give into desire, and at the same time expect to somehow magically be free from the pressure of the desire, well that's just a contradiction in terms. Restraint needs to come first if you want to be free from desire. Then the obvious painful nature of the desire in itself becomes apparent.

Initially when people start restraining, they notice more pain and they assume that it's because of their restraint. But it isn't. The restraint cannot cause you pain, it can only reveal the underlying pain of the desire that is already there.

Imagine that you're tied to five powerful animals and they are running towards the objects of their desire, you naturally run with them to avoid that extra painful pull that you will experience if you try standing your ground. The animals are stronger than you, they pull you. It's unpleasant. But that doesn't mean that that initial pain is not there if you run with them. Running with them enables them to pull you even harder. So initially, you have to accept that sharp pain of restraint, which eventually you can see that actually it's not the restraint that's the problem, the restraint just shows you what happens when these animals are pulling in their respective domains. If the animals wouldn't be pulling, there wouldn't be any pain revealed by the restraint. Imagine the animals are tamed and calm, and they just move around slowly and you can just remain seated and not have to run with them. You are restrained, the senses are tamed and there is no pull, no pain.

It's something anybody could benefit from, just learning how to say no to themselves, gradually, in regards to this and that, in regard to unnecessary things like luxuries and indulgences. Because each time you give in carelessly like that, the animals get more to feed on which means they get more powerful, which means each time they pull you, you'll be less and less able to resist those desires.

Quite often, and I'm pretty sure many people can relate, your own desires take you to places you don't want to be, that you know you will regret even before you go there, yet you can't help it and you're just dragged there. How will it then be when old age or sickness sets in? When your senses start to fail, yet your mind is fully dependent on that pleasure that you get from that temporary satisfaction of your desires. When the only resemblance of relief from any disagreeable feelings, is now taken away. When the senses can't enjoy sense objects anymore, when eyes can barely see, when it's hard to hear, when it's difficult to chew, when the body doesn't move correctly, when it's not young and doesn't have that much energy. Yet your mind is dependent on that constant chasing after sense pleasures and now that's just taken away. How will it be when the unpleasant feelings arise, and they will, and you have even less ground to deal with it.

Q: It will feel like an unwanted solitary confinement.

Nm: Exactly. That's why people are terrified of solitude. They can no longer escape what they have been running away from.